

The Non-Subscribing Presbyterian.

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An Introduction.

THE *Non Subscribing Presbyterian* on making its first appearance desires to state that it is not the mouthpiece of any organised body of men or churches, but that it is entirely the project of private enterprise. Nor does it enter the field as a competitor with any other recognised paper. The sole reason for its appearance lies in the fact that throughout the North of Ireland there are a number of Non-Subscribing Churches more or less isolated from each other, the majority of whose people have not at present any means whereby they may know what is taking place in

districts other than their own. It is among these people that the paper would circulate. Its chief aim is to act as a medium of introduction, and if possible to bind together for good and for mutual helpfulness the members of one household of faith. The methods pursued will be modest. Not so much to express opinion, as to act as a record of what is being thought and said and done in Non-Subscribing Churches will be the object. And that this end may be attained a cordial invitation is hereby given to co-operation. News paragraphs from Church and Sunday School will find ready acceptance so long as space admits; and whilst there will be a special place reserved for the Temperance movement, any news calculated to help on the social betterment will be gladly received. The paper, it is believed, can be made to meet a felt want. Will those whom it would serve kindly lend a hand to make it a success? To do so would mean their good, and the good of their Church.

CONFERENCE at NEWTOWNARDS.

On Saturday, June 1st, there was held in the historic "Meeting-house" known as the First or Old Presbyterian Church, Newtownards, the eighth of a series of annual gatherings, which, from their beginning, have been amongst the most interesting and successful held in connection with our Church. It was a Conference of Sunday School Teachers and others interested in the religious training of the young. This matter is certainly, from the point of view of the future, the most important that could occupy the attention of any Church.

Such gatherings always accomplish more than appears on the surface. Even if we leave out of account all the papers read, resolutions passed, etc., we find that what is by **no** means the least important factor in the situation still remains; and that is, the help that is gained just by exchanging ideas concerning our common interests, and our successes and failures, and taking one's part in a gathering of people from different places, drawn together by a common aim and interest. This applies specially to members and workers of a Church like ours, whose constituent congregations are very scattered, and many of them small in numbers. At one of these meetings, recently, the remark was made in our hearing, "I did not know there were so many of our people in all Ireland."

Most of us have made acquaintance with the "friend and brother" who is ready to express the conviction that "ours is a dead cause," and to point the finger of scorn at the smallness of our numbers, while he himself helps to make them smaller by his invariable absence from public worship and his refusal to lend a helping hand in any of the work that is being done. One feels inclined to reply that "Our cause would very quickly disappear from the world if all Unitarians were like yourself! It would be dead with a vengeance if they were all like you!" It is good for friends of this type occasionally to see an assembly which is impressive in the only respect which seems to appeal to them, namely, in visible size.

The Newtownards meeting was held under the Presidency of Rev. W. H. Drummond, B.A., President of the Association of Irish Non-Subscribing Presbyterians and Other Free Christians, and the attendance included ministers and representatives from nearly all our congregations in the North of Ireland. The proceedings opened with an impressive discourse by Rev. Edgar Lockett, Banbridge, on "The Purpose and Ideal of the Sunday School Teacher." Among those who took part in the discussion which followed were Rev. C. Thrift (Ballyhenlin), Rev. J. A. Kelly (Dunmurry), Mr. J. Kelleher (Larne), Miss Mellone (Warrenpoint), Revs. W. H. Drummond (Belfast), S. H. Mellone (Holywood), A. Turner (Templepatrick), and R. M. King (Newtownards).

Mr. Lockett took the word "witness" to illustrate the purpose and qualification of the teacher. A true witness was one who knows, and who imparts his knowledge to others. Among various conceptions of the object of the Sunday School, he selected that which regarded it as a supplement to the Christian Church. The great purpose of the Sunday School was to bring the children and young men and maidens to a knowledge and experience of the redemptive love of God. This being so, the purpose of the Sunday School teacher must be to endeavour by the influence of his personality and teaching to communicate the power and wisdom and love of God to his scholars. With the saving power of God's love in his own heart, he is to seek to save those entrusted to his care from the evils which beset their path. It was the mark of such a witness that he delivereth souls, and this could be done only by one who himself knew and visited the Soul-deliverer. This witnessing for God as the result of knowing him and being known of him, rested upon faith in the reality of the Holy Spirit—the presence and power of God working in and with man. If they were to have religion taught in their schools—and how great was their need of it?—they must as teachers know what religion meant by a personal knowledge and experience of it. Reorganisation of

method or material is good; but the great need is regeneration in the Holy Spirit. And they must go to God for this, humbly, persistently, sincerely.

In simple yet forcible words the speaker brought home to his hearers the great thought that, for the teacher of religion, the fountain-head of all true work is divine, and that he who works truly must learn to be in touch with that divine source of power. It was felt by all that he had pointed out the ideal in all its purity, and that what it meant was that the true teacher must be God-inspired. What, then, is the relation of this ideal to the ordinary means, methods and opportunities of work in our schools? The discussion showed a feeling that this contrast needed to be faced and explained. The greatness of the contrast was only too evident. Was it possible that the ideal set forth by Mr. Lockett was too high? Everyone felt that it was not too high—that we ought to be more religious (in the true meaning of the word) than we are, and come right into the presence of Jesus Christ, not to discuss opinions, but to let his life master our lives. Some of the speakers referred to details belonging to what we may call the practical execution of the teacher's work: such as means of instruction in Scripture knowledge, in citizenship, in the grounds and truths of Unitarian belief, and so forth. These things seemed to have a right to recognition; was it true that

these practical things were only earthly and human, and the ideal (that the teacher must be God-inspired) had nothing to do with them? On the contrary, it had everything to do with them. At last the suggestion was made, that the divine inspiration which the teacher needs is not to be won all of a sudden, but gradually; that we are not called upon to jump out of our circumstances and go to some other world to get it; that we win it best by faithful and earnest use of the ordinary opportunities and means that our work affords. If in beginning Sunday School work we feel it as a privilege, demanding the best we have to give, and if we act on this feeling, then we shall not be without our reward.

The Convener of the Association's Sunday School Committee, Rev. A. O. Ashworth, made the important announcement that the Committee are considering the preparation of a scheme for the better training of scholars in Bible knowledge. A resolution was passed unanimously commending the adoption of such a scheme. He further announced that an invitation had been received from the Larne congregation to hold the Conference there in 1908. The invitation was heartily accepted.

A vote of thanks to the congregations of Newtownards, Ballyhemlin, and Greyabbey for their joint hospitality concluded the proceedings.

The Annual Meetings.

The Annual General Meetings in connection with our Churches were held in the First Presbyterian Church, Rosemary Street, on June 18th and 19th. This year they were of more than usual importance, owing to the fact that the proposals for re-organisation and union of the whole denomination, which were originally due to Dr. John Campbell, had been under discussion during the previous year.

Hitherto we have consisted of at least three different denominations without any effective union, that is, without any union available for mutual aid and

common strength. About two-thirds of our Churches in the North have been embraced under the "Remonstrant Synod of Ulster" (driven out seventy-seven years ago, for adherence to non-subscription, by the supporters of Henry Cooke); of the remaining third, three congregations are not connected with any Presbytery, and are known as "Free Christian Congregations;" the others constitute the "Presbytery of Antrim," the oldest home of "New Light" doctrine in Ireland. Dublin and Clonmel form the "Synod of Munster." Ministers and lay representa-

tives from the various Churches have met annually to constitute the "Association of Irish Non-Subscribing Presbyterians and Other Free Christians," which, though it represents all the Churches, has been a deliberative, not an executive body. The Association and the Remonstrant Synod have met annually on different days, and have ignored each other as far as possible.

It has been inevitable that much of the business should be of a routine character, that is, liable not to vary much from year to year; but its importance has been great, involving as it has done the management of large funds (notably those of the Orphan Society, under the Non-Subscribing Association, and those of the Sustentation Fund, under the Synod), and the oversight of the work of the Sunday School and Temperance Committees, not to mention other matters of almost equal importance. Nevertheless, the condition of our denomination has been in some respects like that of a business house whose different departments are not properly co-ordinated.

Last year the Association appointed a committee to take into consideration the whole question of re-organisation, to confer with the individual congregations, and to formulate definite proposals to be laid before a *pro re nata* or special meeting of the Association in the present year. The Committee prosecuted its work with vigour during the year. A draft Constitution and a draft Code of Discipline were prepared and submitted to all the settled ministers and congregations for their approval; and a remarkable degree of agreement has been arrived at on general lines. In their original draft the committee recommended the adoption of the name "Free Presbyterian Church of Ireland," but owing to the numerous criticisms of this proposal which they received, they



Interior: First Presbyterian Church, Belfast.

finally recommended the name "Non-Subscribing Presbyterian Church of Ireland" as the one most likely to be widely acceptable.

The Special Meeting of the Association was held on Wednesday morning, June 19th, when there was a large attendance of ministers and specially appointed lay delegates. There were two resolutions to be moved on behalf of the committee; the first was to the effect that the Congregations and Presbyteries be asked to unite and to constitute the new Church Body on the basis of a general acceptance of the Constitution, leaving the Code of Discipline and the many points of detail which it involves for future discussion and decision; the second, to the effect that these and certain other practical, legal, and financial questions were to be considered by the committee, which was to be reappointed for these purposes. The adoption of the proposed Constitution was moved by the President, Rev. W. H. Drummond, and seconded by Dr. John Campbell. The discussion which followed showed that the meeting was pervaded by a fine spirit of

unity and enthusiasm; and the resolutions were both eventually carried with entire unanimity.

The Constitution thus adopted sets forth a statement of the religious and moral principles on which the Non-Subscribing Presbyterian Church of Ireland is based. It is a Constitution of which any Church might be proud. This is not the place to set forth at length its exact words; instead of doing this, we shall give our readers the opportunity of having before them in permanent form the following passages from the able address given by Dr. Campbell in seconding the resolution.

"When looked at from the philanthropic point of view, the fact that we are here to-day assembled for the purpose of federating our congregations assumes an importance which it is hard to realise. It opens up to us the possibility of effectually and systematically doing a vast mission work among the poor, both in town and country. Federation will enable us to look after the orphans, the widows, the infirm, and the aged in an effective manner. By means of funds common to the whole Church the rich are enabled to help the poor, and the wealthier congregations are given a means whereby they can assist the poorer congregations in philanthropic denominational work.

"But by far the most important benefit which we may derive from our adoption of this resolution is the prominence which will thereby be given to the moral and spiritual improvement of ourselves. We are Non-subscribers to human creeds and confessions, but we are so because we desire to accentuate the fact of our adherence to the creed of Christ. This has always been the fundamental principle of Non-subscription. This positive affirmation, which underlies our negative designation, is the important factor in our existence as a denomination. Hitherto it has been recognised as an unwritten statement only. To-day we are about to solemnly declare our attachment to it as the central point round which our congregations gather themselves into a Church. One of the minor historians of Irish Presbyterianism has recently pointed out that 'in the early days of

Christianity the question of personal purity engaged the attention of the elders more than the doctrines of a creed.' We have always desired to uphold this position as the essential one for the Christian Church. To-day we are about to declare our opinion that 'unity is to be sought, not in uniformity of creed, but in a common standard of righteousness and obedience to the commandments which Christ himself has laid down.' The fact that we have publicly declared our allegiance to this principle in religious organisation is bound to have good effect on our people. A high ideal may be hard to attain; but the very fact that we have it in view will stimulate us and make us capable of doing better than we otherwise would."

The decision thus arrived at was felt to be a momentous one, and if the spirit shown at this meeting is really wide spread among all our people, it is a decision which will make history. It will mean the end of that hopeless individualism which has ever been the greatest hindrance in our way. By "individualism" we mean the state of things where each person is guided by his own fancies, opinions and prejudices, and by nothing else; where even the idea of there being such a thing as *the common good* never enters into anybody's head; where any man saunters into Church and listens (or does not listen) to the service and sermon, just as he feels inclined; stays away when he feels inclined; gives a helping hand, or stands aloof, just as he happens to feel inclined.

The decision is a momentous one in another way also. In every quarter of Christendom there is a movement in the direction of greater Christian freedom of thought in matters of doctrine, even in the Church of Rome; among the orthodox Presbyterian Churches throughout the world there is a growing opinion in favour of modifying the terms of subscription to the Confession of Faith; and during the last half-year, public attention has been called to the utterances of the Rev. R. J. Campbell and what he and others call the "New Theology." These facts, of which the Moderator of the Remonstrant Synod

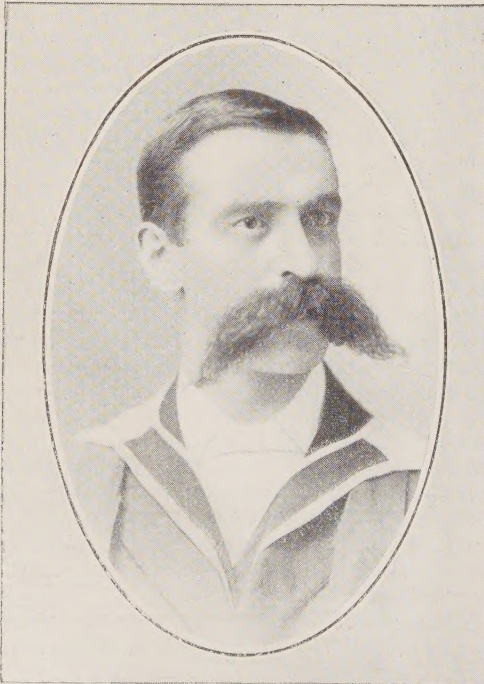
reminded his hearers, are signs of an *under-current of change* more powerful than many people dream of; and it is a movement tending at length to burst the bonds fixed by human creeds, and to allow the Religion of Christ free power in the world. There could be no more opportune time for a denomination with a history like ours to come forth and boldly assert in the face of the world those principles of Christian freedom which have been far too much hidden in obscurity in the past.

In connection with the Annual Meetings, the Communion Service of the Lord's Supper was held in All Souls' Church on Thursday morning, June 20th. A large number of friends came together to join in the service. The devotional portion was conducted by Rev. W. H. Drummond, and a helpful address was given by Rev. T. Dunkerley. It is hoped that this service will be held annually on the same occasion.

Owing to Wednesday morning being occupied with the special meeting of the Association, the annual service in connection with the meetings was held in the First Presbyterian Church on Tuesday evening, June 18th. Divine Service was conducted and an impressive sermon preached by the President, Rev. W. H. Drummond. We are glad to hear that the sermon is to be printed and circulated.

The Association dinner was held in the Old Castle Restaurant on Wednesday evening. There was a very good attendance of ministers and other friends. It was noticed that what may be called our "charter toast" took a new form of expression—"The Non-Subscribing Association and the future of Our Church." As the Rev. A. Gordon, who proposed it, pointed out, now for the first time we are entitled to speak, not of "Our Churches," but of "Our Church."

Installation of Rev. H. J. Rossington, M.A.



Rev. H. J. Rossington, M.A.

Notwithstanding weather of the severest description, there was a very good attendance in the First Presbyterian Church, Belfast, on Thursday morning, June 20, when the Rev. H. J. Rossington was installed as minister of the Church by the Presbytery of Antrim, according to Presbyterian law and custom. The attendance included members of the congregation and ministers and friends from other Non-Subscribing Churches. A number of the general public were also present.

Dr. Campbell, in his memorable address on "The Spirit of the Reformation," given in this Church two years ago, reminded us that the Presbyterian form of government gives the minister adequate security of tenure. He has a life interest in his pulpit. In selecting a minister, the congregation gets every possible latitude. They have every chance of choosing the most suitable available man; but, once their choice is made, they

must abide by it. On this account it has always been the Presbyterian tradition to combine with a statement of the distinctively religious aspects of the minister's work, a public profession of adherence to the relationship between the minister and the congregation, to be made by both parties, and also a statement of the principles of Presbyterian order.

The order of the installation service is the same as in the orthodox Presbyterian Church, with one all-important exception. A few other differences of mere detail are not here taken account of. The proceedings open with devotional service and sermon by the minister of the Presbytery who was last installed or ordained, then follows the exposition of Presbyterian principles, then the Moderator of the Presbytery asks the congregation and the minister whether they adhere to the call and the acceptance of it, respectively. This being answered in the affirmative, he invites the minister to give a statement of the principles and objects which he sets before him in his new sphere of work. It is at this point, in the "orthodox" order, that formal subscription to the Westminster Confession of Faith is required. In our Non-Subscribing Churches of course no declaration of adherence to any creed is required. The service concludes with "charges" given to the newly-installed minister and to the congregation by the senior minister of the Presbytery or some other.

On the interesting occasion of which we speak, the opening portion of the service was conducted by Rev. S. H. Mellone, M.A., D.Sc., of Holywood, who preached from the text Romans xiii. 12: "The night is far spent; the day is at hand." Rev. Alexander Gordon, M.A., gave a clear and forcible exposition of the first Principles of Presbyterian order, pointing out the position held by the laity under this order, and the importance of their fulfilling their duty in this respect. The Moderator of the Presbytery of Antrim, Rev. W. S. Smith, then put the prescribed questions to Mr. Rossington and to the congregation. These having been duly answered, Mr. Rossington made a brief but eloquent statement of the Christian principles by which he desired his work to be guided.

The officiating ministers, other ministers present, and members of the congregation, then gave him the "right hand of fellowship," signifying their hearty good will. The Rev. W. Napier, of Clough, addressed the minister and people, and spoke out of an experience in the Christian ministry extending over fifty years.

Afterwards, there was a pleasant and large gathering at lunch in the Grand Central Hotel, when Mr. John Rogers presided with his usual geniality; and sincere felicitations were offered to the newly-installed minister and to the congregation. Mr. Rossington, who has made a good record in the north of England, enters on his work among us under the happiest auspices.

Unity Guild.

The second Annual Service of the Guild was held in All Souls' Church, on June 2nd, and despite the wretched weather a fair number attended. We were especially gratified to find a number of our Holywood friends brave enough to face the elements. We wish their example had been more largely followed by the members in Belfast. The sermon was preached by the President, Rev. W. H. Drummond, who gave a stimulating address on Christian Citizenship, and pointed out how the members of the Guild might interest themselves in some of the social questions of the day.

Moneyrea.—Floral Services were held in the Moneyrea Unitarian Church on Sunday, 23rd June, and were conducted by the Rev. G. J. Slipper. The Church was beautifully decorated, and there were large attendances both morning and afternoon. Special hymns and anthems were sung by the choir, and the collections, which were in aid of the Sunday School Funds, amounted to nearly £6.

Death.

CHAMBERS.—19th June, at her brother's residence, Tallynaskeagh, Downpatrick, SUSAN CHAMBERS, aged 73.

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Ulster Unitarian Christian Association,



35, Rosemary Street, Belfast.

Business Hours—10 till 5.

Hon. Secretary—Rev. J. A. KELLY.

Saturdays—10 till 2.

Assist. Secretary—Rev. G. J. SLIPPER.

The Depository is open daily for the sale of Unitarian Literature, including the publications of the British and Foreign Unitarian Association, Sunday School Association, Manchester District Sunday School Association, and American Unitarian Association. Tracts and Pamphlets expository of Unitarian Principles may be had free on application, or will be sent by post to enquirers if stamped envelope is enclosed with application.

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